
Early Writing

JANE AUSTEN

The History of England from the reign of
Henry the 4th to the death of Charles the 1st (1791)†

*By a partial, prejudiced, & ignorant Historian.
To Miss Austen eldest daughter of the Revd George Austen, this
Work is inscribed with all due respect by The Author
N.B. There will be very few Dates in this History.*

Henry the 4th

Henry the 4th ascended the throne of England much to his own satisfaction in the year 1399, after having prevailed on his cousin &

† From *Jane Austen: Minor Works*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1954), pp. 138–49. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press. Written when Austen was not quite sixteen, this short work is a send-up of such popular histories as Oliver Goldsmith's *History of England from the Earliest Times to the Death of George II* (1771) and his subsequent *Abridgement* (1774), and of history writing in general, with its sober pretensions to accuracy and impartiality. *Northanger Abbey's* Catherine will echo the suspicion evident here that historical accounts, in fact, necessarily omit some things and invent others. History, Catherine confesses, "tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all—it is very tiresome: and yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention" (p. 74). *Northanger Abbey's* narrator will likewise complain that "the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England . . . are eulogized by a thousand pens," whereas those of novelists are demeaned (p. 22). In her own "History of England," Austen exaggerates the convention of abridgement through short, glib pronouncements on the most gnarled of historical matters. At the same time, her breezy disrespect for complete facts and her fully indulged political partisanship lampoon other aspects of the genre. Thus she shamelessly champions the Yorkists over the Lancastrians in the War of the Roses; declares herself "partial to the roman catholic religion" (a joke directed at her clerical father, says Tomalin [p. 66]); and claims her chief intention in the History is to exonerate Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland, while abusing Queen Elizabeth for having executed her. It is hard to know how seriously to take the Tory sympathies suggested by this nostalgia for the Stuarts. I suspect an element, at least, of playful perversity in her defense of a "bewitching Princess whose only freind was then the Duke of Norfolk, and whose only ones are now Mr. Whitaker, Mrs. Lefroy, Mrs. Knight & myself." Certainly, as many have remarked, the effect is a narrative of historical decline inverting standard Whig accounts of inexorable progress. I would also note that pitting Mary against Elizabeth at the center of her history would seem to offer an alternative to those versions with "hardly any women at all." Austen dedicates "The History" to her sister Cassandra who illustrated it with watercolor caricatures of the monarchs. All notes are the Editor's.

predecessor Richard the 2d, to resign it to him, & to retire for the rest of his Life to Pomfret Castle, where he happened to be murdered. It is to be supposed that Henry was married, since he had certainly four sons, but it is not in my power to inform the Reader who was his Wife. Be this as it may, he did not live for ever, but falling ill, his son the Prince of Wales came and took away the crown; whereupon the King made a long speech, for which I must refer the Reader to Shakespear's Plays,¹ & the Prince made a still longer. Things being thus settled between them the King died, & was succeeded by his son Henry who had previously beat Sir William Gascoigne.

Henry the 5th

This Prince after he succeeded to the throne grew quite reformed & Amiable, forsaking all his dissipated Companions, & never thrashing Sir William again. During his reign, Lord Cobham was burnt alive, but I forget what for. His Majesty then turned his thoughts to France, where he went & fought the famous Battle of Agincourt. He afterwards married the King's daughter Catherine, a very agreeable Woman by Shakespear's account. In spite of all this however he died, and was succeeded by his son Henry.

Henry the 6th

I cannot say much for this Monarch's Sense—Nor would I if I could, for he was a Lancastrian. I suppose you know all about the Wars between him & The Duke of York who was of the right side; If you do not, you had better read some other History, for I shall not be very diffuse in this, meaning by it only to vent my Spleen *against*, & shew my Hatred *to* all those people whose parties or principles do not suit with mine, & not to give information. This King married Margaret of Anjou, a Woman whose distresses & Misfortunes were so great as almost to make me who hate her, pity her. It was in this reign that Joan of Arc lived & made such a *row* among the English. They should not have burnt her—but they did. There were several Battles between the Yorkists & Lancastrians, in which the former (as they ought) usually conquered. At length they were entirely over come; The King was murdered—The Queen was sent home—& Edward the 4th Ascended the Throne.

Edward the 4th

This Monarch was famous only for his Beauty & his Courage, of which the Picture we have here given of him, & his undaunted Be-

1. See *1 Henry IV*, *2 Henry IV*, and *Henry V*. The speeches cited here occur in *2 Henry IV*, 4.5.

haviour in marrying one Woman while he was engaged to another, are sufficient proofs. His wife was Elizabeth Woodville, a Widow, who, poor Woman!, was afterwards confined in a Convent by that Monster of Iniquity & Avarice Henry the 7th. One of Edward's Mistresses was Jane Shore, who has had a play written about her,² but it is a tragedy & therefore not worth reading. Having performed all these noble actions, his Majesty died, & was succeeded by his Son.

Edward the 5th

This unfortunate Prince lived so little a while that no body had time to draw his picture.³ He was murdered by his Uncle's Contrivance, whose name was Richard the 3d.

Richard the 3rd

The Character of this Prince has been in general very severely treated by Historians, but as he was *York*, I am rather inclined to suppose him a very respectable Man.⁴ It has indeed been confidently asserted that he killed his two Nephews & his Wife, but it has also been declared that he did *not* kill his two Nephews,⁵ which I am inclined to believe true; & if this is the case, it may also be affirmed that he did not kill his Wife, for if Perkin Warbeck was really the Duke of York, why might not Lambert Simnel be the Widow of Richard.⁶ Whether innocent or guilty, he did not reign long in peace, for Henry Tudor E. of Richmond as great a Villain as ever lived, made a great fuss about getting the Crown & having killed the King at the battle of Bosworth, he succeeded to it.

Henry the 7th

This Monarch soon after his accession married the Princess Elizabeth of York, by which alliance he plainly proved that he thought his own right inferior to hers, tho' he pretended to the contrary. By this Marriage he had two sons & two daughters, the elder of which daughters was married to the King of Scotland & had the happiness of being grandmother to one of the first Characters in the World. But of *her*, I shall have occasion to speak more at large in future.

2. *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* (1714) by Nicholas Rowe. Shore's influence over Edward IV was the subject of numerous poems, ballads, histories, and plays from the sixteenth century onward.
3. Cassandra supplied portraits of all thirteen monarchs except Edward V.
4. In the opening of *Northanger Abbey*, the heroine's father is similarly described as "a very respectable man, though his name was Richard." There was apparently a running family joke about the name Richard.
5. A reference, notes Chapman, to Horace Walpole's *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard the Third* (1768).
6. Perkin Warbeck and Lambert Simnel were both imposters and pretenders to the throne of Henry VII.

The Youngest, Mary, married first the King of France & secondly the D. of Suffolk, by whom she had one daughter, afterwards the Mother of Lady Jane Grey, who tho' inferior to her lovely Cousin the Queen of Scots, was yet an amiable young woman and famous for reading Greek while other people were hunting. It was in the reign of Henry the 7th that Perkin Warbeck & Lambert Simnel before mentioned made their appearance, the former of whom was set in the Stocks, took shelter in Beaulieu Abbey, & was beheaded with the Earl of Warwick, & the latter was taken into the King's Kitchen. His Majesty died, & was succeeded by his son Henry whose only merit was his not being *quite* so bad as his daughter Elizabeth.

Henry the 8th

It would be an affront to my Readers were I to suppose that they were not as well acquainted with the particulars of this King's reign as I am myself. It will therefore be saving *them* the task of reading again what they have read before, & *myself* the trouble of writing what I do not perfectly recollect, by giving only a slight sketch of the principal Events which marked his reign. Among these may be ranked Cardinal Wolsey's telling the father Abbott of Leicester Abbey that "he was come to lay his bones among them", the reformation in Religion, & the King's riding through the Streets of London with Anna Bullen.⁷ It is however but Justice, & my Duty to declare that this amiable Woman was entirely innocent of the Crimes with which she was accused, of which her Beauty, her Elegance, & her Sprightliness were sufficient proofs, not to mention her solemn protestations of Innocence, the weakness of the Charges against her, and the king's Character; all of which add some confirmation, tho' perhaps but slight ones when in comparison with those before alledged in her favour. Tho' I do not profess giving many dates, yet as I think it proper to give some & shall of course make choice of those which it is most necessary for the Reader to know, I think it right to inform him that her letter to the King was dated on the 6th of May.⁸ The Crimes & Cruelties of this Prince, were too numerous to be mentioned, (as this history I trust has fully shown;) & nothing can be said in his vindication, but that his abolishing Religious Houses & leaving them to the ruinous

7. Anne Boleyn, second wife of Henry VIII (after he broke with the Catholic Church to divorce Katherine of Aragon), and mother of Queen Elizabeth. She was later accused of adultery and executed.

8. According to Chapman, one of the few dates mentioned in Goldsmith's *History*; Austen is amused by its insignificance and further mocks Goldsmith's disregard for dates by declining to specify the year.

depredations of time has been of infinite use to the landscape of England in general,⁹ which probably was a principal motive for his doing it, since otherwise why should a Man who was of no Religion himself be at so much trouble to abolish one which had for Ages been established in the Kingdom. His Majesty's 5th wife was the Duke of Norfolk's Neice who, tho' universally acquitted of the crimes for which she was beheaded, has been by many people supposed to have led an abandoned Life before her Marriage—of this however I have many doubts, since she was a relation of that noble Duke of Norfolk who was so warm in the Queen of Scotland's cause, & who at last fell a victim to it. The king's last wife contrived to survive him, but with difficulty effected it. He was succeeded by his only son Edward.

Edward the 6th

As this prince was only nine years old at the time of his Father's death, he was considered by many people as too young to govern, & the late King happening to be of the same opinion, his mother's Brother the Duke of Somerset was chosen Protector of the realm during his minority. This Man was on the whole of a very amiable Character, & is somewhat of a favourite with me, tho' I would by no means pretend to affirm that he was equal to those first of Men Robert Earl of Essex, Delamere, or Gilpin.¹ He was beheaded, of which he might with reason have been proud, had he known that such was the death of Mary Queen of Scotland; but as it was impossible that He should be conscious of what had never happened, it does not appear that he felt particularly delighted with the manner of it. After his decease the Duke of Northumberland had the care of the King & the Kingdom, & performed his trust of both so well that the King died & the Kingdom was left to his daughter in law the Lady Jane Grey, who has been already mentioned as reading Greek. Whether she really understood that language or whether such a Study proceeded only from an excess of vanity for which I beleive she was always rather remarkable, is uncertain. Whatever might be the cause, she preserved the same appearance of knowledge, & contempt of what was generally esteemed pleasure, during the whole of her Life, for she declared herself displeased with being

9. Austen has in mind those, like *Northanger Abbey's* Catherine Morland, with a romantic taste for ruined abbeys.

1. As Austen elaborates below, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, fell out of favor with Elizabeth I and was eventually executed. Frederic Delamere is a character in Charlotte Smith's novel *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788), whose misfortunes Austen likens to that of the "gallant Earl." William Gilpin is known for his writings on the picturesque, which Austen satirizes in several subsequent works, including *Northanger Abbey*. As a group of "first" men, this list is comically eclectic and far-fetched.

appointed Queen, and while conducting to the Scaffold, she wrote a Sentence in Latin & another in Greek on seeing the dead Body of her Husband accidentally passing that way.

Mary

This Woman had the good luck of being advanced to the throne of England, inspite of the superior pretensions, Merit, & *Beauty* of her Cousins Mary Queen of Scotland & Jane Grey. Nor can I pity the Kingdom for the misfortunes they experienced during her Reign, since they fully deserved them, for having allowed her to succeed her Brother—which was a double peice of folly, since they might have foreseen that as she died without Children, she would be succeeded by that disgrace to humanity, that pest of society, Elizabeth. Many were the people who fell Martyrs to the Protestant Religion during her reign; I suppose not fewer than a dozen. She married Philip King of Spain who in her Sister's reign was famous for building Armadas. She died without issue, & then the dreadful moment came in which the destroyer of all comfort, the deceitful Betrayer of trust reposed in her, & the Murderess of her Cousin succeeded to the Throne.

Elizabeth

It was the peculiar Misfortune of this Woman to have bad Ministers—Since wicked as she herself was, she could not have committed such extensive mischeif, had not these vile & abandoned men connived at, & encouraged her in her crimes. I know that it has by many people been asserted & beleived that Lord Burleigh, Sir Francis Walsingham, & the rest of those who filled the cheif offices of State were deserving, experienced, & able Ministers. But oh! how blinded such Writers & such Readers must be to true Merit, to Merit despised, neglected & defamed, if they can persist in such opinions when they reflect that these Men, these boasted Men were such Scandals to their Country & their Sex as to allow & assist their Queen in confining for the space of nineteen years, a *Woman* who if the claims of Relationship & Merit were no avail, yet as a Queen & as one who condescended to place confidence in her, had every reason to expect Assistance & Protection; and at length in allowing Elizabeth to bring this amiable Woman to an untimely, unmerited, and scandalous Death. Can any one if he reflects but for a moment on this blot, this everlasting blot upon their Understanding & their Character, allow any praise to Lord Burleigh or Sir Francis Walsingham? Oh! what must this bewitching Princess whose only freind was then the Duke of Norfolk, and whose only

ones are now Mr Whitaker, Mrs Lefroy, Mrs Knight & myself,² who was abandoned by her son, confined by her Cousin, Abused, reproached & villified by all, what must not her most noble mind have suffered when informed that Elizabeth had given orders for her Death! Yet she bore it with a most unshaken fortitude; firm in her Mind; Constant in her Religion; & prepared herself to meet the cruel fate to which she was doomed, with a magnanimity that could alone proceed from conscious Innocence. And yet could you Reader have beleived it possible that some hardened & zealous Protestants have even abused her for that Steadfastness in the Catholic Religion which reflected on her so much credit? But this is a striking proof of *their* narrow Souls & prejudiced Judgements who accuse her. She was executed in the Great Hall at Fortheringay Castle (sacred Place!) on Wednesday the 8th of February 1586—to the everlasting Reproach of Elizabeth, her Ministers, and of England in general. It may not be unnecessary before I entirely conclude my account of this ill-fated Queen, to observe that she had been accused of several crimes during the time of her reigning in Scotland, of which I now most seriously do assure my Reader that she was entirely innocent; having never been guilty of anything more than Imprudencies into which she was betrayed by the openness of her Heart, her Youth, & her Education. Having I trust by this assurance entirely done away every Suspicion & every doubt which might have arisen in the Reader's mind, from what other Historians have written of her, I shall proceed to mention the remaining Events that marked Elizabeth's reign. It was about this time that Sir Francis Drake the first English Navigator who sailed round the World, lived, to be the ornament of his Country & his profession. Yet great as he was, & justly celebrated as a Sailor, I cannot help foreseeing that he will be equalled in this or the next Century by one who tho' now but young, already promises to answer all the ardent & sanguine expectations of his Relations & Freinds, amongst whom I may class the amiable Lady to whom this work is dedicated, & my no less amiable Self.³

Though of a different profession, and shining in a different Sphere of Life, yet equally conspicuous in the Character of an *Earl*, as Drake was in that of a *Sailor*, was Robert Devereux Lord Essex. This unfortunate young Man was not unlike in Character to that equally unfortunate one *Frederic Delamere*. The simile may be carried still farther, & Elizabeth the torment of Essex may be compared to the Emmeline of Delamere. It would be endless to recount

2. John Whitaker is the author of *Mary Queen of Scots Vindicated* (1787); Mrs. Lefroy and Mrs. Knight are family friends.

3. Austen's brother Francis had finished naval school and sailed for the East Indies in 1788.

the misfortunes of this noble & gallant Earl. It is sufficient to say that he was beheaded on the 25th of Febry, after having been Lord Leutenant of Ireland, after having clapped his hand on his sword, and after performing many other services to his Country. Elizabeth did not long survive his loss, & died so miserable that were it not an injury to the memory of Mary I should pity her.

James the 1st

Though this King had some faults, among which & as the most principal, was his allowing his Mother's death, yet considered on the whole I cannot help liking him. He married Anne of Denmark, and had several Children; fortunately for him his eldest son Prince Henry died before his father or he might have experienced the evils which befell his unfortunate Brother.

As I am myself partial to the roman catholic religion, it is with infinite regret that I am obliged to blame the Behaviour of any Member of it; yet Truth being I think very excusable in an Historian, I am necessitated to say that in this reign the roman Catholics of England did not behave like Gentlemen to the protestants. Their Behaviour indeed to the Royal Family & both Houses of Parliament might justly be considered by them as very uncivil, and even Sir Henry Percy tho' certainly the best bred Man of the party, had none of that general politeness which is so universally pleasing, as his Attentions were entirely confined to Lord Mounteagle.

Sir Walter Raleigh flourished in this & the preceeding reign, & is by many people held in great veneration & respect—But as he was an enemy of the noble Essex, I have nothing to say in praise of him, & must refer all those who may wish to be acquainted with the particulars of his Life, to Mr Sheridan's play of the Critic,⁴ where they will find many interesting Anecdotes as well of him as of his freind Sir Christopher Hatton.—His Majesty was of that amiable disposition which inclines to Freindships, & in such points was possessed of a keener penetration in Discovering Merit than many other people. I once heard an excellent Sharade on a Carpet, of which the subject I am now on reminds me, and as I think it may afford my Readers some Amusement to *find it out*, I shall here take the liberty of presenting it to them.

SHARADE

My first is what my second was to King James the 1st, and you tread on my whole.⁵

4. *The Critic* (1779), a burlesque by Richard Brinsley Sheridan.

5. Austen has mistakenly reversed the syllables here. She presumably meant to write "my second is what my first was to King James the 1st: "pet" is what "Car" was to James I,

The principal favourites of his Majesty were Car, who was afterwards created Earl of Somerset and whose name may have some share in the above mentioned Sharade, & George Villiers afterwards Duke of Buckingham. On his Majesty's death he was succeeded by his son Charles.

Charles the 1st

This amiable Monarch seems born to have suffered Misfortunes equal to those of his lovely Grandmother; Misfortunes which he could not deserve since he was her descendant. Never certainly was there before so many detestable Characters at one time in England as in this period of its History; Never were amiable Men so scarce. The number of them throughout the whole Kingdom amounting only to *five*, besides the inhabitants of Oxford who were always loyal to their King & faithful to his interests. The names of this noble five who never forgot the duty of the Subject, or swerved from their attachment to his Majesty, were as follows,—The King himself, ever steadfast in his own support—Archbishop Laud, Earl of Strafford, Viscount Faulkland & Duke of Ormond who were scarcely less strenuous or zealous in the cause. While the Villains of the time would make too long a list to be written or read; I shall therefore content myself with mentioning the leaders of the Gang. Cromwell, Fairfax, Hampden, & Pym may be considered as the original Causers of all the disturbances Distresses & Civil Wars in which England for many years was embroiled. In this reign as well as in that of Elizabeth, I am obliged in spite of my Attachment to the Scotch, to consider them as equally guilty with the generality of the English, since they dared to think differently from their Sovereign, to forget the Adoration which as *Stuarts* it was their Duty to pay them, to rebel against, dethrone & imprison the unfortunate Mary; to oppose, to deceive, and to sell the no less unfortunate Charles. The Events of this Monarch's reign are too numerous for my pen, and indeed the recital of any Events (except what I make myself) is uninteresting to me; my principal reason for undertaking the History of England being to prove the innocence of the Queen of Scotland, which I flatter myself with having effectually done, and to abuse Elizabeth, tho' I am rather fearful of having fallen short in the latter part of my Scheme.—As therefore it is not my intention to give any particular account of the distresses into which this King was involved through the misconduct & Cruelty of his Parliament, I shall satisfy myself with vindicating him from the Reproach of Arbitrary & tyrannical Government with which he has of-

and together they are "carpet." In *Emma*, Emma Woodhouse readily solves a charade of this kind for the baffled Harriet Smith.

ten been Charged. This, I feel, is not difficult to be done, for with one argument I am certain of satisfying every sensible & well disposed person whose opinions have been properly guided by a good Education—& this Argument is that he was a Stuart.

Finis

Saturday Nov: 26th 1791

JANE AUSTEN

Catharine, or the Bower (1792)[†]

To Miss Austen

MADAM

Encouraged by your warm patronage of The beautiful Cassandra, and The History of England, which through your generous support, have obtained a place in every library in the Kingdom, and run through threescore Editions, I take the liberty of begging the same Exertions in favour of the following Novel, which I humbly flatter myself, possesses Merit beyond any already published, or any that will ever in future appear, except such as may proceed from the pen of Your Most Grateful Humble Serv^t

THE AUTHOR

Steventon August 1792—

Catharine had the misfortune, as many heroines have had before her, of losing her Parents when she was very young, and of being brought up under the care of a Maiden Aunt, who while she tenderly loved her, watched over her conduct with so scrutinizing a severity, as to make it very doubtful to many people, and to Catharine¹ amongst

[†] From *Jane Austen: Minor Works*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1954), pp. 192–93; 196–99; 229–33. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press. The most ambitious of Austen's juvenile works, dedicated to Cassandra. Unlike Catherine Morland, this Catharine likes history as well as novels. Still, she anticipates the heroine of *Northanger Abbey* not only in her love of reading but also in her unaffected enthusiasm. Camilla Stanley seems even more clearly an early version of the flighty Isabella Thorpe; and in both texts the girls compare notes on their favorite authors. Edward Stanley, on the other hand, combining John Thorpe's insensitivity with Henry Tilney's charm, looks forward to the seductive Frederick Tilney and to such later rake-figures as Willoughby (in *Sense and Sensibility*), Wickham (in *Pride and Prejudice*), and Henry Crawford (in *Mansfield Park*). I include this excerpt because Mrs. Percival's axiom that the national welfare depends on female chastity was in general circulation among Austen's conservative contemporaries. Claudia Johnson suggests that Austen, too, used the familial as a figure for the national but did so to more subversive ends (*Jane Austen*, pp. 1–27). For example, *Northanger Abbey's* interrogation of paternal authority may also raise questions about the authority of the state. Notes to this selection are Chapman's.

1. "Kitty," erased here and above, stands elsewhere.